

## Let my hair down and grow up by LucyBrown45

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**Summary:**

“Steve’s good people.”

Billy releases his hands, balls his fists and pounds them on the side of his seat. His mouth all wonky and too much air on his tongue for, “S’pose.” He twists to peer at Jim. “How d’ya know?”

“Chief of Police.” He winks. Brushes burger crumbs from his chinos. Looks left. Looks right. Lifts the handbrake and presses down on the accelerator.

## **Let my hair down and grow up**

Billy's ID says he's seventeen. Just a baby. But he was a handful to get over to the station. He's not a small guy. Even though. He's doing a pretty good job of pretending to look like a victim. Eyes all watery at the corners. Chin ducked down. Chief Jim Hopper is not going to be taken in by these theatrics.

"What were you doing out there?"

Billy rolls his eyes. "I tol' you."

Hopper sits back in his chair, grips his knees. "No. You lied to me."

Through his teeth, "I don't lie," Billy hisses.

"Kid." Hopper looks over Billy's shoulder trying to catch Callahan's attention. "It's two in the morning. It's thirty out there. With windchill."

"Windchill."

"Don't test me."

Billy shoves his hands in his pockets and stands up. "I want to go."

"Christ." Hopper waves his hand. Squints through one eye at Billy. "You never been brought in, before? You can't go. You stay here until you tell me what's going on."

"It's a lookout point. What more do you want me to say?" Billy knows his voice is rising. Like steam. Cheeks rosy-lee warming. Left hand cupped in right, thrust at Hopper. Imaginary alibi.

Hopper stands up. He's bearlike. "So I'll tell you again. It's not a lookout point in the middle of the night. In below freezing weather conditions." He puts his hands on his hips. "Sit down."

Billy groans, loudly. But does as he's told. Kicks his legs out to push against Hopper's desk, the chair scraping obnoxiously backward. Ignores Hopper walking around him and out the office door.

Callahan is good at the night shift. Jim can smell the blue bubblegum he's chewing. "Chief."

Jim leans down to him. Keeps his voice soft so that it doesn't echo out. He doesn't want Billy overhearing. "Where's the Camaro?"

"We dunno, Chief." He taps idly at a stack of ledgers near his telephone. "The record says the Cali plates were switched out a week ago."

"So. He walked up there?"

"Guess so."

Jim stands up straight and looks at the back of Billy Hargrove slouched in his seat. Jim's not a man to covet such things, but Billy's wearing a thick cashmere scarf. A rich, forest green tartan. There's a fancy silk label that sticks out near Billy's earlobe, some designer name in gold script.

It's a weird thing to see 'round the neck of a teenager. A city yuppie's purchase. Hawkins is a small town and Jim knows. That the Hargroves are not city people. Joyce had said that Diane had said that there was a new girl at the Food Co. And he wasn't snooping. But he might have swung by. For *Eggos*. For *El*. Mrs Hargrove is a slight thing. Milkthistle. Girllike. More so than her daughter.

That's not what he means. Just that. Hopper's seen the Hargrove family. Wandering the park on Sundays. Awkwardly matched. With each other. With Billy. Billy, who looks. Permanently offended. Disappointed. The kid pushes his chin into his palm. Cracks his neck. Catches Jim watching. Twists and hangs his legs over the arm of the chair. "Are you gonna drive me home, or what?"

Jim sighs loudly. Glances at Callahan. He supposes. Technically. Billy hasn't broken the law. Just been a dumbass. And Jim's paranoid. He looks at the clock. Puffs his cheek out. Swings his elbow out at Billy in a lazy arc. Done for the night.

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"There a Chick-A-Fil 'round here?"

"No." Jim drums his fingers on the edge of the steering wheel. "It's over in Danesville." Nudges the back of his hand up to twitch the indicator. "The mall they're building?" Looks left. "'s gonna have one." Looks right. "Apparently."

He doesn't care too much for fried chicken, but Jim's been keeping a close eye on the ever-changing list of vendors signing on to be a part of the incoming Hawkins Starcourt Mall. Downtown, people are worried.

Billy sniffs.

"Why? You hungry?"

Kid shrugs. "Kinda."

They're nearing the strip with the Arcade, the liquor store that Jim is sick to the back teeth of noting down in arrest paperwork. The shady, bail bonds office that Jim has barely civil relations with. Jesus. They let the kids hang out here. The glow of the neon turquoise *Barbie's* sign reflects down across their laps as they drive by. Jim sighs and pulls the station wagon abruptly into the parking lot.

"Wait here, then."

Barbie is Benny's sister. Was Benny's sister. Jim's not sure how that works. The vicious thunder crackle at the base of his brain tries it out for him. *I am Sara's dad*. His head shudders, ear rubbing against his shoulder before pushing open the diner door.

She's a sweet woman. Jim can't look her in the face. She's got that. Jim can't say. A sadness. Probably. Something about how her eyes fit in her head. The angle of the corners of her mouth. Anyway. "Jim. Hello, sir." She's sweet.

Her voice rings out, copperlike. Like swimming pool ripples in the stale air of the empty restaurant. Jim scuffs at the edge of his biceps, hands sliding up under the cuffs of his thick coat. "I can't do you fries, Jim. I've drained the oil for the night."

"No problem, Barbie." Jim watches as she flicks the gas hob on, collects a spatula from a wide flour tin. Pulls eggs from the

refrigerator. "No problem." He leans back on the counter to wait.

The way Barbie's outside fairy lights hang over the front window send light flickering in strange shapes. He can't quite see out clearly. Billy is sat on the hood of his Chief Chevy. Smoke seeps from his mouth. A smudgy shimmer doubled up in the palm of Billy's hand.

Jim pauses at the door. Food wrapped in a paper bag tucked under his arm, ducks his head to light his own cigarette. As he approaches, the flare of Billy's lighter becomes clearer. A bewildered firefly running back and forth over the hem of Billy's scarf. The edge crinkling black under Billy's bored destruction.

He stands in front of the kid. Drags on his cigarette before speaking. "Well. You've ruined it."

Billy looks at him. Thick brows hunching down over narrowed eyes. Tips his chin up slightly. "If there's. Like. Roadkill. Who cleans it up?"

Jim offers his smoke to Billy. The kid takes it. No hesitation. "Roadkill?" He holds his hand out for Billy's lighter. Pockets it. "No one." Jim grasps at Billy's wrist, tugs him down from his perch. Talks over his shoulder as he walks around to the driver's side. "Potholes, on the other hand." Inside the front cabin, he puts the food on Billy's lap and turns the ignition. "There's a form for that."

At the deserted intersection, Billy hands Jim his breakfast burger. "Don't let me catch you messing about like this." He wipes a napkin over his chin, mopping egg yolk. Tired gaze caught on the headlight shine of the white edge of the stop sign, chewing mouth nearly open.

Billy shrugs and picks at his bread bun. Pulls out the tomato slice and sticks his tongue out to catch it. "Steve's a good driver."

"You're kidding, right?" Jim turns to look at Billy. His scarf all loosened around his neck, Virgin Mary glinting up at him. "That kid took seven tries to get his licence."

Billy snorts.

"His dad tried to bribe me into giving him one. Came into the station

with a bottle of whiskey. I said, 'Bill, that's not my department'."

"Mr Harrington is called Bill?"

Jim clears his throat. "Yeah. But, don't do anything stupid. Don't call him that."

"Nosir."

"You meet him?"

Billy looks at his knees. Pushes the box with his roughed over burger towards Jim. Shakes his head. "Uh-huh."

"Maybe you should." Jim takes a bite.

"Why?" Billy pinches at the burnt edge of his scarf.

Jim wipes at melted cheese. "Hmm." Scrunches his napkin up. "It's good to know good people."

Billy tips his head back. His cheeks have gone pink despite the chill in the car. He hunches forward, tucks his hands under his thighs. "I guess."

Jim's not known Bill for very long. Bill went to Hawkins Prep'. Went to college, Jim assumes. Met Liana. Probably met Katie. Came home to roost. He's driving the construction of the new mall. The luxury condos they wanna put up with it. He's told Jim about the two-for-one building permits. Sounds messy. But who's Jim to judge.

"Steve's good people."

Billy releases his hands, balls his fists and pounds them on the side of his seat. His mouth all wonky and too much air on his tongue for, "S'pose." He twists to peer Jim. "How d'ya know?"

"Chief of Police." He winks. Brushes burger crumbs from his chinos. Looks left. Looks right. Lifts the handbrake and presses down on the accelerator.

"He." Billy shrugs. "Can't cook though." Looks out the window.

Jim grunts. He can't stand that faltering. Reminds him too much of the interview room.

Tone fogged over, just thinking out loud, Billy says, "They didn't have any food. Just. Half packets of cookies. Fruit bowl. Soup mix. Like. Hospital food, man."

In the tawny shadows, the spray of brown fur is a smear over the asphalt. Frantic, he gets a death grip on Jim's forearm, jabs a finger at the glass. Yelling, "The deer. It's still there."

"Jesus, kid." Jim shakes his arm. Keeps driving. Clicks his tongue against his teeth. "Christ." He rolls his shoulders back.

Billy glares at him. "You're fine."

The burn of Billy's stare itches at his cheek, but he refuses to turn his head. He flexes his fingers over the steering wheel. "What deer?"

Billy huffs. Goddamn teenagers. "I tol' you. Roadkill."

Jim leans forward, weight heavy on his palms. Feels loose at his hips, feels his spine pop. "The deer don't come up this way, Billy. They're scared of people."

"Exactly." He folds his arms, slouches in his seat. Jim glances at him, just a tad. He's wrapped his scarf back up tight around his neck, mouth obscured by soft green. Jim's not being mean, but he kinda looks like a troll. Blonde curls all spindly and dead-looking in the dark of the cab. Pointed nose, a little white peak outta the moss of his ruined cashmere.

He kinda looks like Jane. She's sorta troll looking Jim figures. It's the eyes. Maybe. Brush-like lashes that hide the whites. Maybe. It's more. A Barbie thing. That. That fucking sadness. That distorts the corners. Adding extra years in thin skin, an eternity to reconcile all that fucking grief. Jim wonders if he's got it too. Thinks about how he doesn't spend too long at the bathroom mirror. Doesn't want to see if he's got it.

He clears his throat. "Billy." He pushes the back of his hand into Billy's thigh. The kid flinches, tries to hide it by sitting up straight.

Jim clears his throat again, pretends not to notice. "Tell me the turning."

Billy scoffs. Like he knows. Jim's bluffing. Points aimlessly at the upcoming turning. "Here." Duh, breathing heavily between them. Jim pulls up to the curb outside the Hargrove house. They've got an odd split-level pathway that none of the other houses on the street do. At the edge of their garage is a huge hawthorn hedge.

Before now, Jim's driven in from the other direction, the shrubbery and the odd paving make the house appear to shrink into the sandstone. On the verge of disappearing. Not that it ever could. Jim unbuckles his seatbelt and shifts towards Billy. The house is a noisy one. "Billy."

Billy doesn't face him. "Stop saying my name. It's weird." He wrings his scarf in his fist.

Jim hangs his head before reaching forward and squeezing Billy's shoulder. Billy hisses and jerks backwards, finally looking at Jim. "You can't just wander up to Judah's Peak. It's hunting ground."

He can see the excuse bubbling on the tip of Billy's tongue. The damn lookout point, that hasn't ever really been a lookout point. Just. Some mad, mountain type carved a bench into the rock up there. And now. Jim has to deal with hikers. And idiots like, Billy Hargrove moseying around up there.

The dashboard clock says it's nearing three thirty. Jim should go back to the station. Billy still hasn't got out of the car. Jim reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a pack of *Lucky Strikes*. "Take 'em with you." He sniffs. "Trying to quit." It's not a lie. Him and Joyce. They're trying. "And don't tell anyone. Jesus."

He flips the edge of Billy's scarf with his middle finger. In a rush, Billy unwinds it from his throat, shoves it at Jim's chest and pushes his way out of station wagon. Jim watches him run up the uneven steps. Presses his hands together over the soft material. It smells like burning.



Jim tries to not shop at Food Co. He doesn't want to be disloyal to Melvald. Or Joyce. But sometimes, he gets a hankering for real *Oreos*, not the off-brand, Indiana-local version the general store stocks.

The checkout girl, Christy. Her nametag tells him. But Jim also knows, that this is Flo's niece. Sorta niece. Related by marriage in someway. Jim's busying himself running through his brain-store of semi-useful Hawkins' family trees while Christy waits for the manager to unlock her mysteriously locked cash register. A fizzing crash sounds over his left shoulder.

He doesn't rush. He carefully twist at the hip, right hand moving to his gun holster. He immediately lowers his fingers, keeps them loose when the source of the commotion makes itself obvious. Mrs Hargrove. Her red hair is neatly tied up, so Jim has a clear view of her face. Her mouth pursed in a desperate shush. At Billy. Billy sprawled on his tummy over a flimsy *Lays* display rack.

He shuffles up onto his knees, doesn't touch her, but gets his elbow viciously behind him, shrugging out of her helping hands. He brushes his hands down over his Hawkins High gym shorts. Brushes his hands over his bare forearms. Exposed by an out of place, blue bowling shirt.

Christy calls out to him about his cookies, but Jim waves his hand at her. He's not leaving without them.

"I'm going to be late now--"

Billy's voice is high and Jim might say he was nervous, if the blush over his chest didn't suggest he was only embarrassed. Getting into a fight with a chips stand. Not cool.

"Oh. Chief Hopper. Hello." Frail. Is the word Jim might use to describe Mrs Hargrove. Which. Jim can't fathom. From what he's heard, Max is no wilting violet. Well. And neither is Jane. Or Nancy. Or Christy. Holy Mother of God. Girls. It gives Jim a stomach ache just to think about.

Billy puts his hands on his hips. Bites his lip.

“Hello, Mrs Hargrove.”

She doesn't tell him to call her, Susan. She pushes at the back of Billy's shoulder, getting him to step forward. He side-eyes her, but doesn't say anything.

“Chief.” She swallows. Jim might say she was nervous. He frowns. “Chief. Billy's got himself into a spot of bother.”

Jim raises his eyebrows. “Oh?”

Mrs Hargrove swallows again. Pats Billy's shoulder. “He walked here. From school. You see.” She looks at Billy. Eyes flickering from his chin up to his hair. She smooths out an errant cowlick. Billy's neck twitches. “Is there. Is there anyway. Anyway, you could. You could give him a ride home?”

Jim puffs up his cheeks, exhales slowly. Smiles at Susan. “No problem.”

Billy seems to think the longer it takes him to walk across the parking lot, the more likely Jim is to drive off without him. Jim retrieved his cookies and is waiting in the car, hand resting on his keys ready to turn the engine on, watching as Billy ambles. Fingers sliding over wing mirrors. Heavy black boots kicking at puddles. Delaying the inevitable.

He looks like he's drunk. He stands at the passenger side. Staring at Jim. Jim stares back. He can wait. He'd rather be here than dealing with paperwork. He opens his *Oreos*. Puts one into his mouth. Whole.

Billy pulls at the door handle, but not enough to open it. Arches his spine. Finally puts weight into his grip and nearly falls on his ass, as the door swings open.

“You done?”

Billy swipes his hand over the seat, crumbs sprinkling. He peeps over the headrest. Surveying the backseat. He finally settles. Awkwardly puts his hands into his pockets. Jims sighs and heads out onto the highway. He pulls another cookie from the pack with his teeth, shakes it at Billy. He pushes it away, making a fake gag sound.

Jim flicks at Billy. The shiny skin of his immunization scar. Billy swats back at him. Jim widens his eyes at that. *I'm Chief of Police, kid.*

He flips down the visor, the early afternoon sun bright. An unforgiving grimace of light. No warmth. He turns the heating on. "Where's your." Jim wants to say clothes 'cause really. Billy's not wearing much, but settles for. "Coat?"

Billy tips his head, ear leant on the shallow between his collarbone and shoulder. "Somewhere."

Jim resists the urge to groan. "Am I taking you home?"

Billy doesn't say anything. Twists his fingers in his lap. The blonde hair on his arms catches the light, splashing in through tree shadows. They drive past the old rec' centre. Jim had been a boy scout there, had learnt how to wrestle, how to identify native Hawkins flora and fauna. He points at it, arm crossing Billy's chest. "There's a basketball hoop there."

"I know."

It's really none of Jim's business. He should just take the kid home, like he promised Susan he would. But troll Billy is a lot like troll Jane. Stomping their little feet over Jim's bridge. Goddamn loud and unavoidable. Sulky as all hell.

Two weeks ago, Vice Principal Curtis had called him up to the high school. Billy and Curtis had been waiting in the office. Calmly seated in those hideous pleather seats that Jim is almost certain were there when he was a teenager.

Curtis had asked Jim to handcuff Billy, even though Billy looked sleepy-eyed. Jim clocked the bouncing knee mirrored by Curtis and did as requested. Waited, at Billy's side, while Curtis told him his punishment for punching a hole through the wall of classroom 3A.

The trouble, Jim thinks, is that Billy's not like the other kids. Jim wants to choke himself out for coming to such a weak conclusion. Jane. She's not like the other kids. Jonathan. He's not like the other kids. But it's not the same. With Billy. It's not that he's different, or

new. Or even the dad thing.

It's something that Jim can't put his finger on. Can't scan all his Hawkins mind catalogues for the right description or phrase. Jim's neck prickles. He doesn't have the words for it, but. He doesn't want to say it. 'Cause it's not fair.

But. Billy. Sometimes, in the past. When Jim worked closer to Danesville. Worked in homicide. They'd be victims. Dead ones. And he'd hear their story and their case would unravel and it would be nasty and awful and *nobody deserves this*. But also. They'd have this thing that Jim couldn't name. A thing that Jim knew was what lead them to being found like that.

Jim's not saying that there's anything to predict that kinda thing. But.

Billy's found a mini-box of raisins in the glove compartment and is helping himself.

"Let's at least, warm you up."

"I'm not cold."

"I thought you didn't lie."

Billy kicks his feet at the curved underside of the dashboard. "I don't."

Jim chews at the inside of his cheek. He doesn't want Billy to die.

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"Five-oh-five."

"You got it, kid." Jim smiles at Jane. Sat at the kitchen table. Knife and fork poised in her fists in front of two steaming meatloaf servings. She looks a picture of home. He tries to ignore the swoop in his chest. Worried at how real it might be for her. His mind flickerflashes the girls of Hawkins. All they've got to be scared of. Protected from. And Joyce. Jesus, Joyce.

Billy, lingering by the front door, shifting through Jim's two-day-old

mail says, “ You got any lemonade?”

Jane clumsily pours a glass of Melvald’s own red *Kool-Aid* outta the pitcher and Billy sits down next to her before gulping grossly at it. She giggles and pours another glass and one more when Jim hands her the spare cup from the sideboard.

Jim’s pushing his index finger along the cardboard fold of another frozen dinner when Billy pipes up, “I won’t eat that.”

“Okay.”

Jane points at the kitty-corner work surface, where they keep the fruit bowl, the extra large family peanut butter, cheese puffs.

“Can I call my mom?”

“Sure.” Jim looks down at his meal and pointedly looks up at Jane. She rolls her eyes at him. But doesn’t do anything about the peanut butter. They eat quietly, unable to avoid overhearing Billy’s soft, hurried voice.

“I’m fine.

“They’re fine.”

It suddenly lilts with a whine. “I love you too.”

There’s goose pimple up and down Billy’s arms. He keeps the cabin warm for Jane and there’s a damp sheen over Billy’s chest. Even so, Jim drags the folded throw from the back of his chair over Billy’s shoulders. Tucks it under his thighs, loosens a gap so he can get his hand out to eat Jane’s peas she’s pushed in his direction.

Billy coughs. “I called too late.” He looks around at Jane’s clock. “Five. I have to call at five.”

Jim saws his knife through his meat. “There’s always tomorrow.”

Billy misses his mouth and gets peas in his lap. He shuffles, the blanket swishing, to pick them back up. Jim wonders again if Billy’s been drinking. But he can’t smell it on him. Clumsy, maybe. But, that

was never the excuse for the wall. And it could easily have been.

He picks the remote up and reaches behind him to switch the TV on. *Love Boat*. Billy doesn't turn around, but Jane wiggles in her seat. He's got to get her away from the box. Outside, but not outside. Christ.

Billy clicks the prongs of his fork on the table. "Has Judah's Peak always been hunting ground?"

"Err. Yeah." Jim takes a sip of juice. "Hmm. No. Actually, I guess not. Thomas Harrison is the license keeper. So. At some point. I suppose he decided to start granting them."

"Right. Harrison."

"Yep." Jim looks to Jane again. She seems unmoved by Billy. He suddenly feels dumb for bringing the kid here. All those precautions. All of them. Then, this boy. With his. Unnatural quality that unmoors Jim. Makes him feel responsible. Culpable. Sat here eating Jane's greens and he hasn't even asked her name.

Something funny must happen on *Love Boat* because Jane laughs with the audience. Jim suspects she's going to chew him out for Billy's visit later. *Why can't Mike come?* Jim knows why, deep down. But, he's not going there. Not tonight.

Billy's got little gold hoops in his ears that Jim has never noticed before. They camouflage well with his hair. They're so delicate, that it changes the shape of Billy's face in Jim's head. Makes him less troll. Jim thumbs at his own earlobe. Remembers how mad his dad had been when he got it pierced. Tries not to think about Mr Hargrove's slim mouth, tight at the edges of his cheeks.

Tries not to think about how he'll have to take Billy home. At some point.

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The night shift always starts at five. Which means Jim is wrapping up when the same week-end sweats start to tickle at his underarms. Friday night always unnerves him. It shouldn't. He knows it

shouldn't. Not in his line of work. It was alright. In the old days. Near Danesville. When he could guarantee something would happen. Friday nights are bad nights. In Hawkins, though. It's difficult to predict. It could be the end of the world. Or not. And that unnerves Jim.

Along the highway, he spots the kids, but they don't see him. He brings the station wagon to a halt a little way up the road. Looks into his wing mirror.

"This is disgusting."

"Shuddup. You wanted to do this." Steve swings his baseball bat gently against his calf. He should have grabbed a shovel. Or a rake. Or something.

They stand on opposite sides of the deer. Looking down at it. There's no blood on the road, just scraps of ground-in fur. Its neck is bent at the angle of its demise and its tongue froths from its mouth in a sickly pink spread.

"It's a doe, right?"

Steve squints at Billy. "Yeah. No antlers."

"No, but. Young deer don't have antlers."

Steve pushes his sunglasses up on top of his head. It was getting hard to see and now. He just really wants a good look at Billy's face. The blue of his eyes gone kinda navy in the dimming light. Matched to his neat duffle coat.

"Bucks. Young bucks."

"Whatever."

The sky's purple plumes give off a false sense of heat. *Red sky at night, shepherds' delight*. Steve's not sure where he first heard that. Maybe mom. Probably Aunt Katie. He's wearing a thick cable knit sweater under his jacket, but it's not quite doing enough to keep him warm.

Not yet, anyway. “So we’re just gonna-“

“Move it. A bit.”

“Out the road?”

“Out the road.”

Steve watches as Billy brings his pinky up to his mouth. Bites the flat of his incisor down on the gold circling a small opal type rock. With a little effort, he leans forwards, snags Billy’s coat sleeve to get him to stop drooling all over his bejeweled hand.

Billy swallows. “Have you got a-“

Steve reaches into the pocket of his jacket and passes Billy the pear he brought.

He looks dolefully at it.

“What?”

There’re rings on all of Billy’s fingers today. Fucking gaudy as anything. They twitch around the almost grainy surface of the fruit. “You didn’t have a banana?”

“No, I-.” Billy follows Steve line of sight over his shoulder. Hopper is loping over to them.

“Boys.” Jim nods at them. Makes a funny little memory-tag motion, spreads his fingers wide. Produces an orange for Billy from the depths of his deep pockets.

Billy stands with the pear in one hand and the orange in the other.

Jim shrugs at Billy’s wrinkled nose. Takes the pear from him and squelches his teeth into it. Mouth full. “Jane doesn’t like bananas.” He passes Steve the shovel. “Weird texture.” Begins shaking out a large tarp’ onehanded. Nods at Billy’s citrus stained cuticles from the peeling. “Don’t leave that here. Who knows what it might attract.”

**Author's Note:**



This is not what anybody wanted. I'm sorry! Thanks for reading though. Part 3 will exist in the near future?

I'm on [tumblr](#).